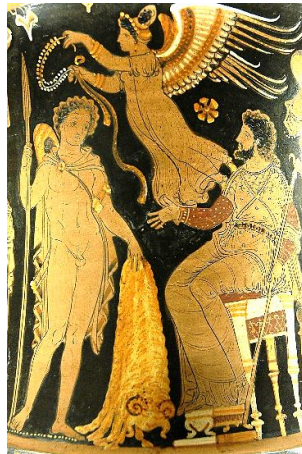


# *MEDEA*

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*by*  
*Owen Barfield*



Edited by J. H. Taylor & Leslie A. Taylor

**Shelfmark:** Dep. c. 1097: 'Medea', a play in verse, 1970s-1983

*Medea*

by Owen Barfield

Edited

by J. H. Taylor & L. A. Taylor

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## Introduction

Sometime in the 1970s Owen Barfield turned to work on the draft of a play entitled *Medea*. Though the archive catalog dates the extant *Medea* typescripts to the 1970s, the origins of the play probably go back at least to the 1940s. J. R. R. Tolkien in a November 1944 letter to his son Christopher reports on a “most amusing and highly contentious” Inklings meeting, including Barfield reading a “short play on Jason and Medea” (103). In a 1985 article in *Seven*, Thomas Kranidas notes that Barfield told him about this evening and the difficulty of reading his “Medea” due to the general “exuberance and friendliness” of the group (26-27). Barfield’s desire to bring this play to the public is suggested by a letter from BBC Radio in October of 1980 rejecting the play as unsuitable “for any of our slots” and offering no other critique. Also found in the archive are two letters commenting on the play written in 1983 by Martin Moynihan, a diplomat and linguist best known to Inklings scholars as the translator of *The Latin Letters of C. S. Lewis*. The handwriting of Moynihan’s letters is difficult but great praise is apparent. The first begins: “Dear Owen, It is a most powerful piece! At first reading, there’s much in it I don’t altogether understand – and, within that, *there’s much I shrink from understanding*. These two combined are both dramatic plusses.” These striking statements say much about this intriguing play on a foundational Classical myth. Moynihan’s letters contain particular mention of both Charles Williams and Tolkien, and some pointed analyses of specific portions and lines. Yet, despite the BBC attempt and these excited reactions from a long-time friend and fellow scholar, the play seems to have remained unknown after this time. This is a truly important work of mythopoesis, a fitting addition to Barfield’s dramatic oeuvre and several deep retellings of ancient mythology—a powerfully composed piece filled with the flavor and insight of Owen Barfield’s wondrous pen.

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*The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*. Ed. Humphrey Carpenter & Christopher Tolkien. Houghton Mifflin, 1981, p. 103.

Kranidas, Thomas. “The Defiant Lyricism of Owen Barfield.” *Seven* 6 (1985): 23-33.

## **MEDEA**

NOTE: In his youth Jason led the expedition of the Argonauts to recover from Aeetes, King of Colchis, the fleece of a golden ram which the latter had formerly stolen from a visitor to his shores. It is well known how, with the help of the sorceress Medea, daughter of Aeetes, Jason vanquished various fabulous monsters and recovered the Golden Fleece. Medea accompanied him on his homeward journey and they eventually arrived as man and wife at the Court of Corinth, where I have supposed that Jason ascended the throne. There are many different accounts of the subsequent history and ultimate fate of Medea, and I have devised my own, following the main tradition since Euripides that, because of the hatred which she came to feel for her husband, she inflicted a horrible death upon her own children in his presence.

## MEDEA

### *Dramatis Personae*

Jason	King of Corinth
Medea	his Queen
Mermerus (aged 10)	
Corilla (aged 7)	their children
Photeus	an elderly Councillor
A Slave	
Huntsmen	

### ACT I    Scene 1

*(A room in the Royal Palace at Corinth. It contains a couch, chairs and other furniture and is lit by candles. The doorway is hidden by the thick curtains which project from the wall in a semi-circle far enough for the door behind them to be opened fully without the curtains being moved. Jason reclining on the couch; Medea beside it on a chair.)*

Medea

Sire, you must sleep! How fares the realm  
 If your hand falters on the helm  
 Palsied with watching? No drug's good  
 Since that strange poison took your blood,  
 Save this I brew.

Jason

You call it strange?

Medea

Sire, the whole Court deplores the change!  
 Drink, and restore yourself!

Jason

Begone!

Let the realm founder! I will none!

Medea

You are not your own to squander! Think—

You are your subjects’.

Jason

I’ll not drink!

Medea

What have I done? Your sharp words break

My heart like blows—

Jason

*(aside)* Now, Jason, speak

Or never! *(aloud)* Stay! I think I seem

Better; but first . . . first hear my dream:

Night blessed this land, the white moon shone,  
 But in my brain bright day lived on  
 When, with your help, I’d wrought so hard  
 That every nerve was fagged and jarred.  
 I could not sleep. Across this floor  
 The moon fell on an open door.  
 I could not sleep. At last I spoke,  
 Calling you softly, if you woke:  
 ‘My longing, my repose, my queen,  
 ‘Come to my threshold and be seen!

‘My own, my goddess tall and wise  
 ‘Of the blue robe and the starry eyes,  
 ‘Come and bring with you the Fleece,  
 ‘Our golden grace of light and peace:  
 ‘One glimpse, one glimmer heals my sight  
 ‘And launches spinning through the night  
 ‘This planet, rock-bound with despair,  
 ‘Mantled in soft and sun-filled air—’

But when you answered not, nor came,  
 I stilled all clamour, pressed no claim;  
 Only a little while I wept  
 And lay long patient—and then slept  
 At last, light, dreamlessly, till—hist!  
 (You burn strength, tugging at that wrist!)—  
 Merciful powers, I slept until  
 You, queen, you, you across my sill  
 Stole, like a thief, all gauze and lace,  
 And stood where they just touched my face . . .  
 I dreamed I woke; and I dreamed you  
 Were the whole world my senses knew :  
 “Lights ho! What hour is’t? Where’s Medea?”  
 “Hush! lest you rouse the guard—she’s *here*!”  
 “Called’st thou me not? Why frown you so?  
 “If’t be the King’s will, I will go—  
 “Only—tomorrow . . . Kings must sleep!”  
 “’Tis true!”

“I am therefore come. Drink deep . . .”  
 I drank. I dared not bid you go:  
 But what needs more? Sweet witch, you know  
 What sorcery lifted, light as air,

The load I only prayed to share  
 And how I followed, through your eyes,  
 And lay becalmed in paradise  
 Hours upon hours, till, tired of this,  
 You suddenly smote me blind with bliss  
 And thrust me off from you and smiled  
 To see me sleeping like a child  
 Claspng its doll, your morning-gift,  
 The scorpion bred beneath your shift!—

Medea

May I do now?

Jason

I have not done:

Then—when you deemed yourself alone—

You—you—

Medea

I feel—

Jason     *(raising a trembling hand to his forehead)*

Perhaps 'twere best

Some other time to tell the rest,

If you must go?

Medea

I feel too dazed

To answer! That your sick blood raised

Unsavoury fantasies (since how men

Are made is not beyond my ken),



I hear and grieve for't. That you blame  
 Me in some way you do not name,  
 Are vexed with me—or so you seem—  
 For being an actor in your dream,  
 Takes my breath from me. But that you  
 Should *tell* me! Me! Oh pardon! I'll do  
 My utmost not to cause distress  
 By showing any! I did most wrong  
 To shrink so, when I heard your tongue  
 Approaching that—oh, were you less  
 Than liege, were we of equal estate  
 That candour how—indelicate!  
 (*Exit*)

Jason

No clearer! No way blasted out!  
 No lightning through these clouds of doubt!  
 They'll never break! Oh God, the pain  
 Of that resolve to speak out plain!  
 The naked anguish, when I heard  
 My own voice stake upon one word  
 Our future lives! The loveless lot,  
 The sword thrust through the wedding-knot!  
 Each kiss, each smile, each word a task!  
 The contract not to drop the mask  
 Day after day! No hope of sleep,  
 Sickness, her hatred—I held cheap  
 All these and more, would they but buy  
 Light of conviction, the clear eye  
 For the true way however hard—  
 So grieved! So startled! Ha! On guard!

Why did she struggle then—foretell  
 Your drift unspoken? You know well  
 She's stubborn and feigns! There's nothing new,  
 Nothing that need perplex your view,  
 Only the disconcerting shock  
 Of the first encounter—a girl to mock  
 The resolute will that piloted  
*Argo!* When first we spy ahead  
 Too clear the perilous way mapped out,  
 Fear prompts us to pretend we doubt.  
 Oh then, if we pause, we doubt in fact  
 And find ourselves unfree to act  
 For ever after! My intent  
 (Should she be taxed and not repent)  
 To shrink from nothing, holds unshaken.

*(Strikes bell)*

But if I prove to have been mistaken,  
 What then? . . . That way damnation lies!

*(Enter slave)*

Tell Photeus, boy, I seek advice. *(Exit slave)*

*(Enter Photeus)*

Photeus

My Lord?

Jason

Oh Phoetus—yes—I sent—

Maybe you are on some labour bent

On which my summons intervenes?

Photeus

Can the end interrupt the means?

You are too thoughtful.

Jason

No, in truth

I must ask pardon here. The youth

Bore a false message; neither news

Nor counsel I seek: their plans to amuse! (*sighs*)

To be frank, my Lord, I hoped to find

In idle commerce with your mind

Peace for mine own! I am much distressed—

May we talk a little? And then I'll rest.

Photeus

Oh Sire, dear Lord, I feel ashamed—

The beggarly service you have named!

And then to ask pardon for't. When I

And hundreds more were glad to die,

Would that bring peace back to your mind!

Jason (*brushing his eyes*)

Weakness does this for me! You are kind!

A man must needs be moved to find

Duty breeds love—love gives so much—

When, elsewhere, love—or what seemed such—

Gives sourly, or withholds instead

Even the bare duty covenanted!

I often think such friends must find

Being loyal to a distempered mind

Uneasy labour. Should they tell

Or hide from him, to get him well,  
 Bad tidings—rumours if you please . . . ?  
 What does that phrase mean, “the King’s peace”,  
 When not the body politic  
 But the body natural is sick?  
 For instance—(*A knock at the door. Photeus  
 goes through the curtains and opens it. He  
 returns with a letter, which he hands to Jason.*)

Photeus

For you, my Lord, from Her Majesty.

Jason (*reading*)

“My Lord, as I have felt myself somewhat  
 ailing since I left you, I will if you please  
 keep my apartments for the space of one or two  
 days. I have made all arrangements so that your  
 comfort may be maintained in the meantime and  
 will, as soon as I can, recover my spirits  
 sufficiently to attend to it once more myself.  
 I am most sorry that this should have happened,  
 while you yourself are ill.”

(*softly to himself*): My poor darling!

Photeus

Shall the slave wait, or come again?

Jason

I’ll write a line now. Quick! my pen,  
 I fear she must be suffer—stay!

(*harshly and suddenly*) No answer! Send the boy away!

*(Photeus does so—and returns from the door)*

Jason

Well, is it so?

Photeus

So?

Jason

*Do you find*

Perplexing problems of this kind?

And if so, how do you decide

What to reveal and what to hide?

*(A pause. Jason shows impatience)*

Photeus

Forgive me! I do understand—

It might well be that in some land

Far otherwise disposed than this—

Some realm where much more was amiss

Than the King's health—the Court *might* hear

Some tale of which a man might fear

Lest speech should injure the King's reason,

Or reticence connive at treason—

Is that your meaning, Sire?

Jason

Even so.

Photeus

Then my answer is a plain, blunt No.

Jason

I am in earnest, Lord!

Photeus

And I!

Jason

Think! I shall trust you utterly.

*(A pause, during which Photeus remains unmoved)*

There's nothing then? However small?

Nothing—we'll say—

Photeus

Nothing at all.

Jason

No (what word?)—No strange doings seen

Or talked—we'll say, about the Queen?

Photeus

Now my dear Lord, let me suggest

It is time for you to seek your rest.

You have talked enough. Will you not try?

Jason

I am in earnest, Lord!

Photeus

And I!

*(approaching Jason and laying his hand affectionately)*

*on his shoulder)*

She is acclaimed on every hand  
 As the first lady in the land—  
 A stately Queen, a sweet, true woman,  
 Noble and gracious, yet how human!  
 A hand how deft, a heart how quick  
 To help the poor and heal the sick—  
 How all now bless with thankful hearts  
 What once they feared, her magic arts!  
 To all, kind looks and courteous tones:  
 Most loving with her little ones,  
 With whom your subjects every day  
 Peep through the pales to see her play,  
 Childlike, at battledore or ball,  
 In the shade under the high wall—

Jason

And do you swear you have never heard  
 One hint of scandal—not one word,  
 One breath?

Photeus

I do.

Jason

Look at me, Lord!

I trust you—*nothing?*

Photeus

Nothing—unless

But 'tis too trivial—

Jason

Ha?

Photeus

You press

So narrowly, Sire, that if I rack

My brains for tattle—oh, good lack!

I *cannot*—

Jason

Tell me!

Photeus

Some weeks back

Our Bureau of Intelligence

Lapsed from its customary sense.

Some new-broom member of the staff,

Unskilled at sifting grain from chaff,

Passed to the Boulé, tabbed and checked,

Some winecup gossip to the effect

That she—

Jason

That she?

Photeus

*(shrugging his shoulders)* a thought too much

Affects the kennel, byre and hutch,

Gives to the stable her private hours

And loves rank odours more than flowers:



'Twas said—

Jason:

Eh? What was that noise? Hark!

Heard you it not? A yelp or bark—

Photeus

*I heard nothing.*

Jason

Nothing? Quick!

Open the door!

*(Photeus passes through the curtains and is heard lifting the latch.*

*After a slight pause he comes out again, shaking his head.)*

I am more sick

Than I had fancied. It were best

You left me now to take my rest.

I am too weary to talk more.

My thanks to you, good Councillor,

For your kind company. Good night!

Pray send the slave to dim the light.

*(Exit Photeus. Jason paces once or twice up and down the chamber, deep in thought.)*

Jason

*(with bitter irony)* “Indelicate!”

*(enter slave, extinguishes all the candles save one, and exit.)*

*(Jason lies down on the couch, covers himself and closes his eyes.)*

Light of this house, O shining Ram!

All I am good for, all I am  
 Is hers: thou know'st, who heard my vow  
 Long since in Colchis: hear me now!  
 Thy fleecy thickness of gold rays  
 Wrap me, through the evil days—  
 Too surely looming, and through this night,  
 In wisdom, gentleness—and might!

*(He relaxes, as for sleep. After a short pause a noise of breathing, whining and scratching is heard outside the door. This is followed by two not very heavy thuds, the second of which is immediately preceded by a faint rattling of the latch and followed by a single sharp yelp. Jason starts up on the couch and listens intently, but the noise is not repeated, and he again lies down and composes himself to sleep. Soon the scuffling and whining begin again. This time there are three thuds, before the first of which the latch rattles faintly as previously, before the second rather more loudly, while the third is preceded by the sharper click which the latch has already made each time the door has been actually opened during the scene. The curtain in front of it stirs and lifts slightly near the foot and then again hangs motionless.)*

The voice of Medea

Husband! Hear'st thou my voice? Lie still!  
 Listen: I mean to have my will.  
 Be wise, be guided, meddle not!  
 No farther probe the angry spot  
 Betwixt us. Use not thy male might  
 To drag the unspoken forth to light.  
 Remember! Battle upon this field  
 How grim, how gray! Love, dear, and yield!  
*(Jason stir uneasily in his sleep and groans. The curtain falls.)*

**Scene 2**

(The same: three or four hours later)

*(Enter Corilla in her nightgown)*

Corilla

Father! Father! Are you awake?

*(She crosses to the couch and pulls his arm. Tearfully:)*

Father!

Jason *(Straining in his sleep)*

Hiloo! hoo! hoo! hiloo!

At her! At her! At her! Ah-h-h-!

Corilla

Father! You've been dreaming!

Jason

What's this? What hour is it? Where's Medea?

*(seeing Corilla)*

Why, little one! My *dear!*

Whatever is the matter?

Corilla

I had a nasty dream—I couldn't sleep—so I've come here.

Jason

Why, I thought you couldn't reach the latch. How did you get in?

Corilla

The door was open.

Jason

What did you dream about? Why didn't you go into your Mother's room?

Corilla

I was frightened. Mermerus has gone to Mother.

Jason

Why?

Corilla

He couldn't sleep either after I woke him up.

Jason

Why did you wake him?

Corilla

I didn't mean to. I woke up screaming, and it woke him.

Jason

My little one! Come! (*caresses her*) But if you were frightened,  
Mother would have made it right again! In her nice warm bed!

Corilla

I was frightened to go to her.

Jason

*Frightened?*

Corilla

I was afraid she might be angry.

Jason

Why, you little silly, how could she be angry  
with a little frightened morsel like this?

Corilla

She might have.

Jason

And such a *kind* mother! The merry games I have seen you playing with her!  
The peals of laughter! Why, she is *never* cross with you!

Corilla

Not very often.

Jason

Well *then* I expect you deserve it, you know! Corilla! Not *frightened*, surely!  
What does she say to you? (*Corilla hangs her head and is silent.*)  
What does she say to you?

Corilla

It's not what she says, it's her voice.

Jason

What sort of voice?

Corilla

I don't know. (*crying*): it bites, daddy, it *bites*!

Jason

Come, come, this is nonsense! You love your mother, don't you?

Corilla

Yes.

Jason

Well, then—

Corilla

When she is angry, it suddenly sounds *like someone else!*

Jason

Ah! (*aside*) Why do I go on pretending not to know? (*To Corilla*):

Well, but Mermerus has gone to Mother's room. So *he* is not frightened anyway.

Corilla

No, father.

Jason

But she is angry with him too sometimes—when he is disobedient?

Corilla

I don't know; he hardly ever is.

Jason

Well, well! You're feeling better now, eh?

(*Corilla sobs; he caresses her. Enter Mermerus in his nightgown*)

Mermerus

Father! Are you awake? Is Corilla there?

Jason

Yes. Come here! Whatever is the matter with you both?

Mermerus

Corilla woke up and woke me and we couldn't get to sleep again. Father—

Jason

What did your mother say?

Mermerus

Father—she's not there. Her room's empty! Where is she?

Jason

*(Sharply)* Did you tell anyone?

Mermerus

*(Surprised)* No! Everyone's asleep. Can we stay here with you, father?

Jason

What hour is it? Go to the window and draw the curtains.

Mermerus *(at the window)*

It's just beginning to get light. Are you any better, father?

Jason

Yes, boy. So much so I think—yes—I will hunt again today.

Corilla

Oh father, you are not nearly well enough! Mother said—

Jason

I must be well enough.

Mermerus

Oh, take me with you!

Corilla

And me!

Jason

Oh children, you are not nearly old enough! No. Listen; don't look so crestfallen. *I* am not well enough, and *you* are not old enough, to join in the hunt properly. But we'll have a glorious day all the same.

What do you say to the old Hunting Box on the hill? There are plenty of things for you two to play with there, and I can watch the hunt from the windows. What do you say? Shall we go?

Corilla

Yes, yes!

Mermerus

I shall watch the hunt too!

Jason

Well—we'll see.

Mermerus

What will they hunt, father?

Jason

Oh, there will be quarry. I—I dreamed there would!



Mermerus

Can we start *now*?

Jason

What? Why, yes; the sun will be up in an hour. Go both of you and get dressed and send the slave for orders as you go.

Mermerus

Come on, Corilla!

*(Exeunt Mermerus and Corilla, as the curtain falls)*

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**Act II**

*(Scene: a large room in the Hunting Box. On one side a large window. The room is rather untidy, with hunting gear scattered about and a few children's toys. Enter Jason, Mermerus and Corilla)*

Mermerus

How musty this room smells! I don't believe anyone's been here for months.

Jason

Open the windows, Mermerus. *(Mermerus does so.)*

*(He picks up a doll from the window-sill.)*

Mermerus

Hulloa, Corilla, here's old Lollia! I thought she was lost.

Corilla

*(Joyfully)* She was lost! She was lost! Give her to me!

*(She takes the doll from Mermerus and rocks it in her arms.)*

Dear Lollia! Go to sleep, then! *(Sings):*

Sleep thou, my baby, on my arm!

Mother shall guard thee from all harm!

There! there! *(laying the doll carefully down again)*

She's asleep now!

Mermerus

Is it more difficult to hunt a wolf than a boar, father?

Jason

Yes, boy, I should say so. It's not often done. Generally, it's the wolf that does the hunting.

Corilla

Will the wolf get away, Mermerus?

Mermerus

Of course not! Where shall we see them, father?

Jason (*pointing out of window*)

You see the little wood down there? I think they will start the quarry there  
The huntsman said that was where the people who have seen her about the  
place think she comes from. Then the dogs will head her up this way  
They went in on the other side. They ought to be coming out soon now.  
Let us see if we can hear them. Listen!

(*Jason and Mermerus turn their heads sideways to listen.*

*Corilla goes to the window and looks out.*)

Corilla

There's a white tower in front of the wood.

Mermerus (*looking out*)

That's not a tower, silly; it's a *person*!

Corilla

What! So tall!

Jason (*looking out*)

It's a woman coming up from the wood. She's not so tall, Corilla.

Corilla

Oh no! Nor she is! How funny!

Mermerus

She's quite near. Why, I believe it's mother!

Jason

It is. Hark! (*a distant barking of dogs is heard*)

It sounds as if they will be some time in there yet, before they break out. (*Sits*)

Corilla

Do you still feel better, father?

Jason

Yes, Corilla, thank you. I feel much stronger. (*She climbs on his knee. Enter Medea.*)

Good morrow, Madam!

Medea

Was this wise?

I heard of this mad enterprise

And came to see if it were true.

You are unkind, Sire, when you do

These reckless things. *You*, who are still

Feeble and feverish and ill,

To venture through this morning air!

Are these your thanks for all our care?

Jason

Well, it was rash perhaps. . . . I too

have a question, Queen: how comes it, you

Are here yourself, when in your letter

You said—

Medea:

But I felt so much better

This morning, Jason—

Jason

So did I.

So for us both let that suffice.

But, Queen, at what hour did you rise?

Medea

Why do you ask me? With the sun

I awoke, and, hearing you were gone,

I rose and dressed without delay

And came—

Jason

Then why did Mermerus say

He found your room untenanted?

Medea

When?

Jason

Long before the night was dead.

*(Medea turns her face away from Jason and towards the audience.)*

Medea

*(aside, with a sudden vicious snarl):* The fussing, babbling fool!

*(Still facing the same way, she dissolves into tears.)*

Jason

Was it not strange?

Medea (*turning to Jason*)

I cannot speak

For woe: what ails you? Why do you seek

And search and probe about it all,

As though I were some criminal?

What *right* have you?

Jason

Was it not strange? (*Medea sobs.*)

You do not answer. Let us change

The topic then: an hour ago

I parleyed, you may care to know,

With several of our people, freed

And slaves alike, an all agreed

Reporting a thing stranger still:

The Bailiff (since I have been ill),

The Master of my Hounds, a nurse,

A guardsman, several gamekeepers

Besides the watchman on his rounds,

Have seen and heard about the grounds

Prowling and howling through those trees

(*pointing at window*) A She—

Medea

Oh man! What ails you? Cease!

If you *must* rave on in this way

Let us at least send *them away!*

*(She indicates the children. The yelping of the pack is again heard faintly in the distance, gradually growing louder as it approaches.)*

Tell me the rest when they have gone, *Please!*

*(lowering her voice, confidentially):*

So you're scratching up my bone  
I buried! You see what you'll get!

Jason *(horrificed)*

Madam?

Medea *(aloud)*

I fear your mind is yet  
Unhealthy: You look wildly, Sire!

Jason

*What did you say?*

Medea

*(raising her voice a little, as if to make herself heard above the now somewhat louder barking of the dogs):*

I said, you tire

Your brain too much. Even now you seem  
Like someone haunted by a dream,  
Stare, as if frightened by some Bug!  
*Why would you not accept my drug?*

*(Commanding shouts are heard outside, and the barking dies away.)*

*Medea crosses to the window and stands there looking out. Enter Photeus.)*

Photeus

Well, Sire, the dogs did all they could,

Yet we found nothing in the wood.

Where shall we—(*seeing Medea*) I intrude, I fear!

I had not heard my Queen was here.

Madam, your humble slave!

*Medea (turning abruptly from the window)*

Mermerus, come here!

*Mermerus (going up to her)*

Yes, Mother?

Medea

Will you and Corilla run back to the Palace

And fetch me something I left behind?

Mermerus

Oh Mother, need we? I want to see everything!

Medea

Oh Mermerus, I want it so much! Be darlings!

(*Mermerus still hangs back*) Shall I start you off?

I know! Come along! We'll have a laughing-race.

Remember, Corilla, you mustn't laugh—

Corilla

No! (*Laughs. Mermerus also begins to laugh.*)



Medea

*(laughing, to Corilla):* You goose! You mustn't laugh till you *get* there!  
 If you do, you've lost the race. *(taking them both by the hand and moving toward the door)* You shall have a start, Corilla, because you're so small.  
 You must go on towards the wood till I call out 'Stop!' Then wait till I—  
*(Exeunt, Medea still talking to them. Jason paces silently to and fro. Photeus crosses to the window and looks out.)*

Photeus *(smiling)*

By Zeus, Sire, 'tis a pretty sight  
 The three there—how the morning light  
 Glows through Her Majesty's raised hand,  
 Ready to start them, where they stand  
 Eagerly waiting! Oh, Sire, pray  
 Look! It is better than a play!  
 Now she has dropped it. Off! The pack  
 Thirsting to join—she holds them back  
 With some slight motion of her arm:  
 By Sirius, she must have some *charm!* . . .  
 Good dogs! Oh wonderfully good!  
 Seem to be folded in her mood . . .  
 Like statues! Frozen on the ground!  
 Gods! Not a quiver, not one sound!  
 By Zeus, look at their nostrils, though!  
 He! And Corilla laughing so,  
 She's lost the race ten times already—  
*Do* come and look, my Lord!  
*(Jason continues to pace moodily across the room. Outside is heard a single, short, terrible howl, half lupine, half human. Immediately the dogs break out into a deafening frenzy of yelping and barking, through which a rush of pattering paws is heard for a few moments before it dies away in the distance,*

*where the yelping still goes on.)*

Photeus

What! *(He cranes out of the window with strained attention.)*

Oh! Oh! Oh! The children! They're on to them! The children! *The children!*

Jason *(dashing to the window)*

You fool! They're *playing!* *(He leans out of the window and utters a wild, despairing cry. Photeus rushes out of the door. Jason cranes further out of the window and yells.):*

Seize the witch!

The Queen! Stamp on the hellish bitch!

Gouge out her eyes! Where is she? Oh!

*(He staggers back into the room with his hand on his eyes.)*

Jason *(breaking down)*

Corilla! *(Eventually he masters himself, starts toward the window and then stops short.)* Photeus! *You tell me!* What's out there?

Photeus *(craning out of window)*

Ho! *(The yelping and barking grow louder again.)*

Voice Off *(shouting)*

Breaking up a she-wolf, sir!

Photeus *(still leaning a little out of window)*

Breaking? No! What? By Cerberus!

Wolf-bred themselves, they're at a loss!

'Dog never eateth dog', they say.

Worrying it—dragging it this way—

Snarling like mad, half rage, half fear . . .

Two men . . .

Jason (*rushing to the window and beckoning through it*)

You fellows! Yes! In here!

*(Enter two huntsmen, carrying the bodies of Mermerus and Corilla, covered, on stretchers improvised from hunting spears and blankets. They pause, awaiting orders.)*

Well? Lay them down! *(The huntsmen obey.)*

The Wolf! Where did she come from?

1st Huntsman

No-one knows, Sir. The wicked varmints (may their fangs rot in their jaws!) hadn't hardly finished their work with these here; the—the life was barely out of 'em, Your Majesty, when she tried to slink past, making for the wood, like. But one of 'em see 'er and give tongue, and they were after 'er like a flash.

Jason

Good for them! Let them rend their fill!

Go, bid the huntsmen, when they kill,

To lift the carcass . . . bring it—*here* . . .

Not slung but—that way *(pointing to the stretchers)*—is that clear?

And bid them see it covered well!

Stay! One of your run back and tell

The Day-Guard of the Golden Fleece

To send it hither; (show them these).

*(He hands certain tokens to the huntsman.)*

And hasten back with it.

2nd Huntsman

Begging your pardon, Your Majesty, but we'd  
like you to know how sorry—*(He stops in confusion.)*

1st Huntsman

Sorry! I'll go on till my dying day  
seeing them little laughing faces change!

Jason

Enough! I thank you. Hurry now!

1st Huntsman

Ay Sir, no more! *(Exeunt Huntsmen. Photeus, after a pause,  
during which he looks anxiously at Jason, follows them.)*

Jason

Oh, bow, bow, bow,  
Proud head, before the levelling wind!  
Ye Gods, I know that I have sinned,  
Being weak and soft: then flowed all this  
From the first self-renouncing kiss?  
Have I been mocked throughout? Our troth  
Plighted, the calm Fleece blessing both  
Hallowed it, made it seem most just  
To join affection (ay, and *trust!*)  
With fierce desire. And I could boast  
(Oh fatuous) all the Olympian host,  
Not Cypris only, when *we* wed,  
Made glorious in our marriage-bed!  
*(The dogs are again heard approaching but this time only with  
occasional, spasmodic, irritated yelps. Jason stops his ears.)*

I shall go mad! *(He crosses to the window and looks out.)*

*(Enter 3rd and 4th Huntsmen bearing a stretcher covered as before.)*

Well, have they finished her?

3rd Huntsman

Dead as mutton, your Majesty!

Jason

Can no-one quiet those yelping curs?

Lay it down here, fellows! *(indicating a spot on the opposite side of the room from the children's corpses)*

*(Exeunt Huntsmen. Outside they are heard endeavouring to quiet the dogs and eventually succeeding. Meanwhile Jason has thrown himself down by one of the children's stretchers and buried his head in the covering blanket. Enter 2nd Huntsmen, carrying the Golden Fleece.)*

Jason *(without looking up, in violent irritation)*

Go away! Get out!

2nd Huntsman

Begging your pardon, Sir: strict orders not to put this here anywhere but in your hands.

Jason *(rising)*

Very well, Give it me. Now go!

*(Exeunt huntsmen. Jason slowly approaches the third stretcher and lays the Fleece carefully over it. While he is doing this, one of the dogs, which has obviously been held quiet much against his will, begins to utter tentative staccato yelps, which succeed one another with increasing frequency until they amount to a continuous bark. The other dogs begin to join in. Jason*

*strides impatiently to the window and pauses there a moment, looking out. The Fleece is stirred by convulsive movements betraying a change in the position or shape of the object beneath it, and at the same moment the barking of the dogs dies away into a single long-drawn whine expressive of mingled fear and yearning. Jason turns sharply and gazes, speechless with horror, at the still jerking Fleece. The whining ceases.)*

Jason *(in a hoarse whisper)*

It—she’s—coming—back!

*(Suddenly he gathers himself together, runs across to the stretcher and strips off the Fleece and covering blanket together, revealing Medea lying apparently dead. He gazes down at her, trembling.)*

Queen, wife and—werewolf! *(Medea stirs slightly.)*

Ha! not even dead!

This was a kind thought, sweet! Hoo!

Let’s to bed!

Medea *(faintly)*

Water, some water for my swollen tongue!

I have come back—

Jason *(beside himself, pointing to the children’s corpses)*

To muzzle your own dung

And lap your vomit!

Medea

Jason, it is I!

The wolf is slain—

Jason

How do I know that! Why?

*(He fills a cup with water and holds it to her lips,  
helping her to sip, as she speaks.):*

Medea

I do not ask forgiveness. I have come,  
 Dragged by the Fleece, unwilling, to this home  
 Where our two lives were linked by erring fate.  
 I should have had a soldier for my mate,  
 Not you, pale boy, with your romantic wars  
 On bulls, and fairy men from dragons' jaws  
 All planted by yourself! My wiles and charms  
 Would have slept safe in tough Achilles' arms.  
 He would have quenched *Its* cravings: how his strong  
 Arm would have chastened me, when I did wrong!  
 But you, because you willed me to be free,  
 Could neither master It, nor let It be;  
 Whence all this ruin!

Jason *(speaking low and slowly)*

Yes. I know the Fleece  
 Lights the truth home . . . no older truth than this?

Medea *(stirring uneasily as the Fleece is mentioned)*

The Fleece! *(coughs)* The blood is choking  
 me! Raise my head! Have mercy!

Jason *(kneeling and raising her head on his arm)*

Medea! Is the pain—

Medea

Ah—h—h! Have mercy! Is there no physician?

*(breathing with increasing difficulty and speaking between gasps)*

In Colchis, husband, when I was a child

A prophet prophesied: he said, a wild

Wolf was my bane—and I should win release

Only by marrying the Golden Fleece

Through one who held it . . . So the King,

My Father, stole the fatal Thing,

And straitly charged me . . . I obeyed . . .

Beguiled you, when I was a maid . . .

Jason . . . d’you see how I was trying . . .

Jason . . . the wolf *is* dead, and I still . . . dying!

*(She groans heavily and expires with her head still resting on his arm. Jason lowers her head gently on to the stretcher and rises to his feet, where he stands with bowed head, gazing down at her.*

*At last he covers the stretcher again with the Fleece. The morning sun, which has been shining through the window, reaches the edge of the Fleece and lights it up, spreading further over its surface, as he speaks the following lines, slowly.)*

Jason

I might still not go mad, could I but know

That in some far time, after much more woe

Wrought on ourselves and others, more blood spent,

It will seem so, that these four torn lives meant

Something, cut out some cancer, left some soul

Purer from deep-grown taint, more sweet and whole:

O Phoebus, if’t shall ever with us two

Be well, and with these little darlings, do,

Merciful God, here in this hour, a sign:

Smile on the Fleece, oh smile, and bid it shine—

Curdle a thin crust over the mess of shame



And torturing memories, which bears Jason's name!

*(Raising his head and seeing for the first time the shining Fleece):*

I dedicate my life, my life of sane despair,

To guarding thee, to saving thee unstained and fair.

*(kneeling):* O holy Ram, wilt thou accept a coward's faithful care?

*Curtain*